

U.S. Backyard Poultry Flocks: Biosecurity Resources, Practices, Risks and Perceptions

NAHMS Backyard Animal Keeping 2024 Study

June 2026

The United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) National Animal Health Monitoring System (NAHMS) Backyard Animal Keeping 2024 Study estimated the percentage of U.S. adults who kept poultry, pigs, goats, or rabbits. Poultry included chickens, turkeys, ducks, geese, and gamebirds (such as pheasants, quail, and partridges) kept at the home, on the property, or in a community coop. Respondents who kept at least one of these bird types provided information about their animal management and biosecurity practices as well as their opinions about backyard poultry. Practicing good biosecurity helps keep birds and people healthy by preventing the introduction and spread of disease. This briefing provides some highlights of the study results related to biosecurity in backyard poultry.

USDA's Defend the Flock Program

The Defend the Flock program offers [free resources](#) and tools that support good biosecurity practices to keep birds safe in flocks of all sizes. Overall, **28%** of adults who kept backyard poultry had at least some familiarity with the Defend the Flock program.



For further information about Defend the Flock and access to resources, such as videos and biosecurity checklists, use the hyperlink or QR code:



Biosecurity Practices and *Salmonella*

Some germs can be transmitted between animals, people, and their shared environment. For example, *Salmonella* is a type of bacteria that can make people sick and can be found in backyard flocks. Some people—especially children younger than 5, adults 65 and older, and people with weakened immune systems—may experience more severe *Salmonella* illnesses that require medical treatment or hospitalization.

Practicing good biosecurity decreases the risk of transmitting diseases such as *Salmonella* between poultry and people in their shared environment. For example, washing hands before and after contact with poultry or poultry supplies (such as feeders, water containers, or other equipment), is an important biosecurity measure.

At least 2 out of 5 adults (40%) who kept backyard poultry always required handwashing or dedicated shoes in the poultry area.

Percentage of adults **always** requiring good biosecurity practices for people



47%

wash hands when **entering** poultry area or **before** handling poultry

80%

wash hands when **leaving** poultry area or **after** handling poultry



44%

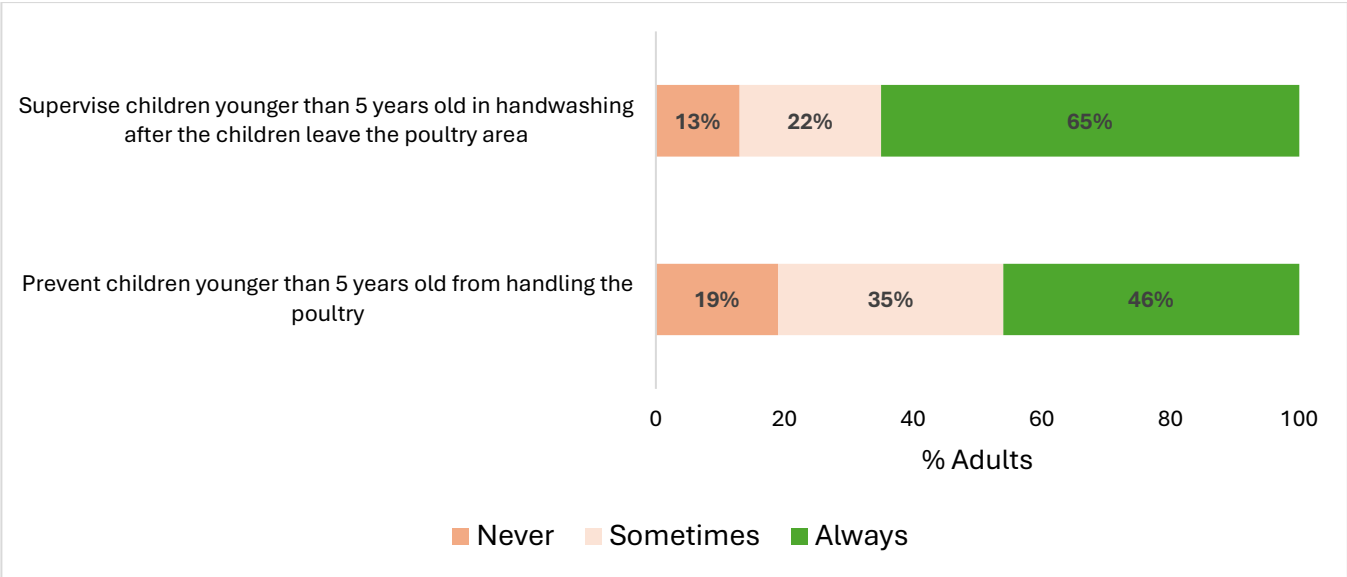
change into dedicated shoes or wear shoe covers when **entering** poultry area

48%

change out of dedicated shoes or dispose of shoe covers when **leaving** poultry area

Children are more often impacted by *Salmonella* infections linked to backyard poultry. Parents, teachers, animal exhibitors, and other adult caregivers can supervise children around backyard poultry to encourage good practices in handwashing and handling poultry.

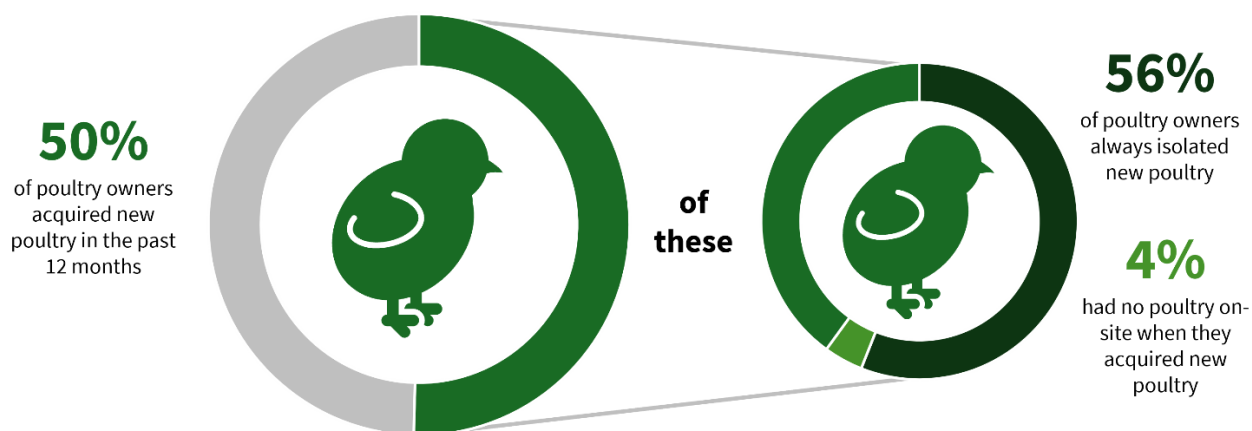
For adults who kept poultry and reported having children younger than 5 years old, **nearly 2 out of 3 (65%)** reported always supervising handwashing when children leave the poultry area. **Slightly less than one-half of adults (46%)** reported always preventing children younger than 5 years old from handling poultry.



Poultry Movement

Animals introduced into a flock may carry diseases that can spread to the rest of the flock. Providing separate housing and access to feed for new birds or those returning from off-site locations for at least 30 days helps ensure they are healthy before introducing or reintroducing them to the current flock. This separation is important to prevent disease transmission.

One-half of adults (50%) who kept backyard poultry acquired new poultry in the past 12 months*. **Over one-half of adults (56%)** who acquired new poultry always isolated** them prior to introduction to the existing flock.

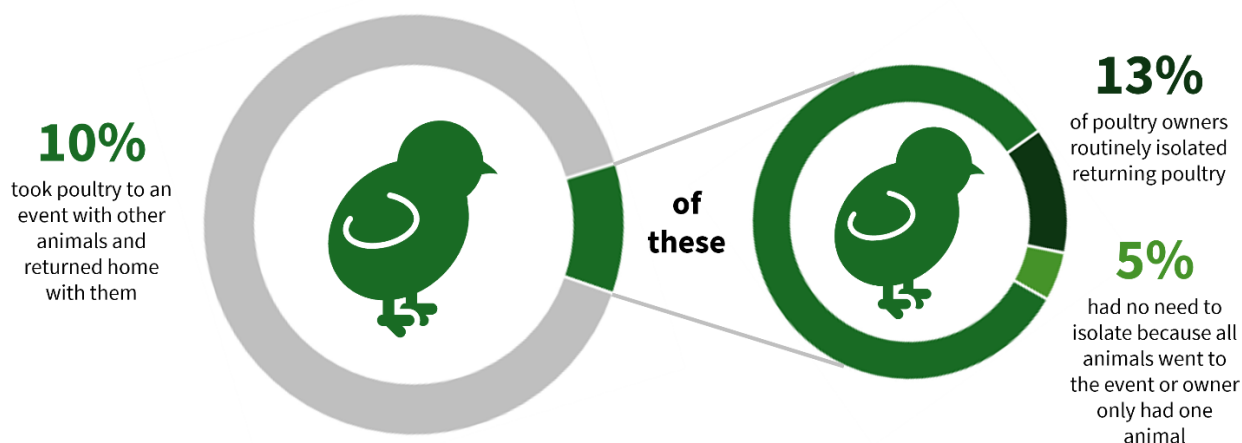


*Not including birds hatched on site. Includes adults who already kept poultry and new owners.

**The term isolation was defined in this study as preventing contact with other poultry and preventing sharing of feed, drinking water, and equipment.

Traveling to off-site locations such as shows, sales, or other events can expose birds to different diseases; birds at such events may shed disease-causing germs even if they appear healthy.

In the past year, one in ten adults (10%) who kept backyard poultry took their poultry to an event with other animals and then returned home with them. Of these, **13 percent** routinely isolated poultry on return.



Wildlife-Related Biosecurity Risks

Wild animals can introduce diseases into flocks, often without direct contact. For example, apparently healthy migrating wild birds sometimes carry avian influenza which can spread to backyard poultry. Signs of avian influenza in backyard poultry can include difficulty breathing; decreased energy and appetite; misshapen eggs or decreased egg production; nasal discharge, coughing, and sneezing; and diarrhea. Sometimes birds can die before showing any other signs of illness. Bird-proofing barns and keeping feed stored in a covered bin or container are ways to reduce contact between domestic poultry and wild birds.

Approximately 2 out of 5 adults (40%) who kept backyard poultry reported seeing wild waterfowl (like ducks or geese) or other wild birds near their poultry area.

Percentage of adults who kept poultry and reported seeing wild waterfowl, other wild birds, or evidence of them within 10 feet of the area where poultry were usually kept in the past year



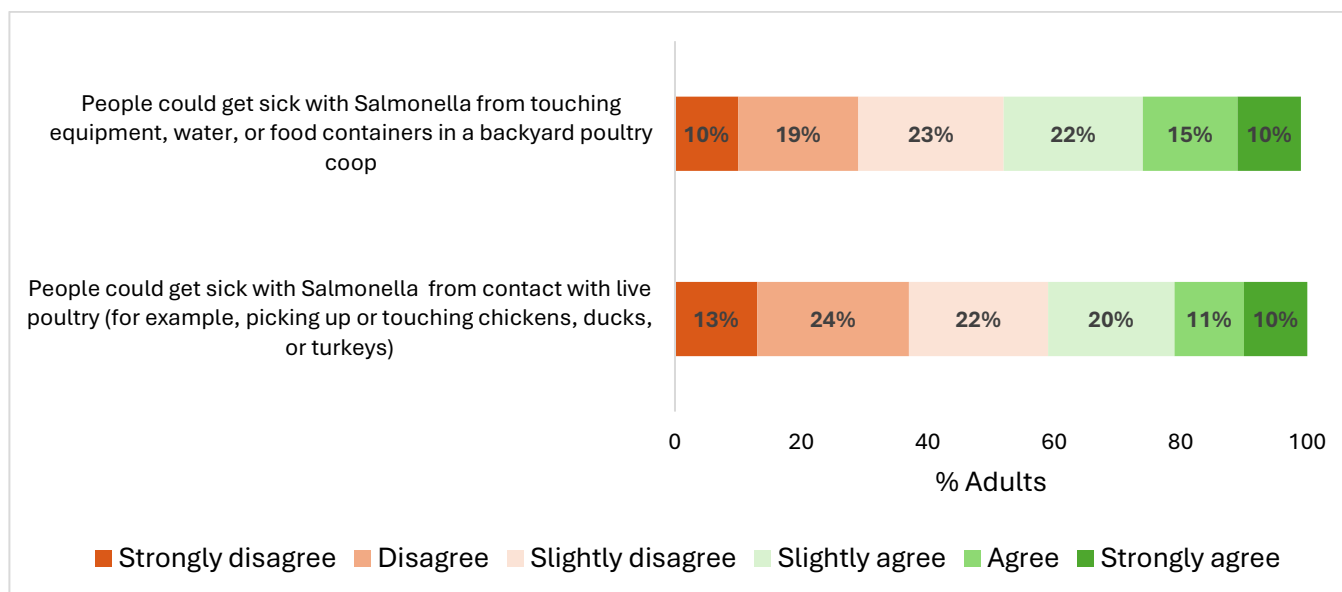
Wild waterfowl - 19%
Other wild birds - 32%



Salmonella Risk Perception

Even poultry that look healthy and clean can carry *Salmonella* and spread it to areas where they live and roam. People can get sick from touching poultry, or objects in their environment, and then touching their face or food. When people get sick with infection from *Salmonella*, they can have diarrhea, fever, and stomach cramps. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and state public health officials frequently investigate multistate outbreaks of *Salmonella* linked to contact with backyard poultry.

Slightly less than one-half of adults who kept backyard poultry **agreed** that people could get sick with *Salmonella* through contact with live poultry (**41%**) or items (**47%**) in a backyard poultry coop.



Recommendations

Backyard poultry owners can take action to help keep their flocks and themselves safe. There are many things that poultry owners can do to reduce the spread of diseases between flocks, families, and their shared environments.

Action steps you can take to protect yourself and your flock:



Clean hands before and after handling poultry or anything in the poultry area: this includes handwashing with soap and water, or using hand sanitizer if there is no visible dirt followed by washing with soap and water when available



Dedicate a pair of shoes to the poultry area: this stops litter or other debris that could carry germs from being tracked into the home or into the poultry area



Isolate poultry new to your flock or those coming back from a show for at least 30 days before being in contact with other poultry to ensure they do not introduce disease to your flock



Supervise children around backyard poultry, prevent children younger than 5 years old from touching poultry, and make sure children wash their hands properly after leaving the poultry area



Limit visitors and ask about other poultry they have been in contact with to prevent disease spread from other flocks or wild birds



Make sure that vehicles and equipment are cleaned and disinfected before and after they come into contact with the flock; be sure to spray the tires and undercarriage of vehicles, where contact with infectious agents is most likely

Resources for more information

APHIS Defend the Flock

<https://www.aphis.usda.gov/livestock-poultry-disease/avian/defend-the-flock>



APHIS Avian Influenza

<https://www.aphis.usda.gov/livestock-poultry-disease/avian/avian-influenza>



CDC Healthy Pets, Healthy People

<https://www.cdc.gov/healthy-pets/about/backyard-poultry.html>



APHIS NAHMS

www.aphis.usda.gov/nahms

